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Senate panel to wrap up Sporkin inquiry

By Bill Gertz
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The Senate Judiciary Committee is scheduled to hear testimony today from a former Central Intelligence Agency official on the nomination of CIA General Counsel Stanley Sporkin to a federal judgeship.

Charles E. Waterman, a 30-year CIA veteran who was an intelligence officer for Middle East affairs until late 1984, is scheduled to testify before the closed hearing, committee spokesman Mark Goodin said.

Mr. Waterman will face questioning from Alabama Republican Sen. Jeremiah Denton, the committee's leading conservative opponent of Mr. Sporkin's nomination, on his relationship with Mr. Sporkin during an investigation of a CIA leak, according to a congressional source who requested anonymity.

Mr. Denton and other congressional critics opposed to the nomination have questioned the propriety of Mr. Sporkin's alleged role in arranging "pro bono," or free, legal counsel for Mr. Waterman during a 1984 investigation of a CIA leak.

Those critics say Mr. Sporkin notified Mr. Waterman that he was being investigated and needed legal counsel. That advice, a source said, hindered the Justice Department's probe into unauthorized disclosures.

Mr. Sporkin, who has denied any wrongdoing, said he was fulfilling his responsibility as the CIA's legal adviser and did not act improperly in informing Mr. Waterman that he needed legal counsel during the investigation of the leak.

Mr. Waterman's lawyer during the investigation, former Watergate prosecutor Seymour Glanzer, has denied working for Mr. Waterman free of charge.

A spokesman for Mr. Denton would not comment on the upcoming testimony other than to say Mr. Sporkin is "under investigation."

But Mr. Goodin said Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Strom Thurmond, South Carolina Republican, agreed to a request by Mr. Denton to hold an open hearing on Mr. Sporkin's "general qualifications" for a federal judgeship. The open hearing will immediately follow today's closed hearing, which will deal with classified intelligence matters.

Mr. Goodin said the committee is winding down its investigation by holding the last of a series of closed hearings on the Sporkin nomination. A final hearing for a vote on the nomination could be taken Thursday, depending on the outcome of today's hearings, he said.

A congressional source said Mr. Denton has placed a hold on Mr. Sporkin's nomination should it reach the floor of the Senate and that a number of conservative senators back Mr. Denton's opposition.

Several conservative senators "are prepared to filibuster at great length and in great detail on this inappropriate nomination," the source said.

Mr. Sporkin has been questioned by the committee in hearings held over the past few weeks regarding his role in a 1984 Justice Department investigation of unauthorized disclosures of classified information relating to the Middle East.

Several Justice Department officials and CIA Director William J. Casey have also testified in recent closed sessions before the committee.

Mr. Sporkin's nomination has been stalled for 17 months by Judiciary Committee members who are exploring what role, if any, Mr. Sporkin played in shielding Mr. Waterman during the investigation.

A former enforcement chief at the Securities and Exchange Commission, Mr. Sporkin is a close personal friend of Mr. Casey, who has been his staunch supporter during the nomination investigation.

Despite the long nomination battle with committee conservatives, White House officials have said they do not plan to withdraw Mr. Sporkin's nomination to a seat on the federal bench in the District, primarily because of continued backing from Mr. Casey.

The CIA has acknowledged that Mr. Waterman was an intelligence officer who left the agency in 1984, but the CIA has not commented on the leak investigation.

An intelligence source said Mr. Waterman, who has not commented publicly on the matter, was implicated in an investigation of the transfer of top secret information contained in a CIA internal publication about Middle East political, military and economic affairs. Details about a possible cutoff of U.S. oil purchases from Libya, the Iran-Iraq war and Iraqi political developments were passed to a Washington-based newsletter, the source said.

Results of several polygraph examinations administered to Mr. Waterman during the leak investigation were inconclusive with regard to questions of passing CIA secrets, allegedly to a biweekly newsletter published by the Middle East Policy Group, according to an intelligence source familiar with the case.

Richard Straus, a spokesman for the Middle East Policy Group, has said he knew Mr. Waterman, but denied that Mr. Waterman ever passed any classified CIA material to the newsletter.

Mr. Thurmond has asked the FBI to investigate leaks of classified information regarding the Sporkin nomination and the Waterman leak investigation that appeared in the press.

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